

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 799

CG 017 969

AUTHOR Zeren, Andrea S.; Ryff, Carol D.
TITLE Psychological Development in Men during Fatherhood.
SPONS AGENCY Fordham Univ., Bronx, N. Y.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (Baltimore, MD, April 12-15, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Development; *Fathers; Maturity (Individuals); *Psychological Patterns; Self Concept
IDENTIFIERS Parenthood

ABSTRACT

While research has examined the salient effect of fathers in child development, little attention has focused on the effect of the infant on the father. The impact of fatherhood on normative male development was investigated in a twofold manner. First, to assess the extent to which the birth experience and actual parenthood produced differing self-perceptions, 80 expectant fathers were compared with 80 fathers on adaptive indices of personality and psychological growth. Results revealed that compared to expectant fathers, fathers manifest significantly greater emphasis on a measure of Purpose in Life and two self-actualization scales, as well as trends toward an increase on a measure of Generativity and a decrease on a measure of Impulsivity. The second assessment examined whether men are aware of change in themselves (recalled or anticipated) as a result of becoming a parent. Results revealed that self-perceptions focused on the fatherhood period were higher on measures of Nurturance, Generativity, and Purpose in Life and lower on a measure of Impulsivity than assessments focused on the pre-fatherhood period. The experience of fathering facilitated male adult development on specific dimensions that define a maturing self-concept.
(Author/JAC)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED252799

PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT DURING FATHERHOOD

1

Psychological Development In Men During Fatherhood

Andrea S. Zeren

St. Lawrence University

Carol D. Ryff

Fordham University

This article was adapted in part from a dissertation submitted to the Department of Psychology, Fordham University in partial fulfillment for the Ph.D. degree.

This research was supported by a dissertation fellowship from Fordham University.

Correspondence should be addressed to Andrea S. Zeren, Department of Psychology, Salem State College, Salem, Massachusetts 01970.

Running Head: PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT DURING FATHERHOOD

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Andrea S. Zeren

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 017969

Psychological Development During Fatherhood

2

Abstract

The impact of fatherhood on normative male development was investigated in a twofold manner. First, to assess the extent to which the birth experience and actual parenthood produced differing self-perceptions, expectant fathers were compared with fathers on adaptive indices of personality and psychological growth. Results revealed that as compared to expectant fathers, fathers manifest significantly greater emphasis on a measure of Purpose in Life and two self-actualization scales, as well as trends toward an increase on a measure of Generativity and a decrease on a measure of Impulsivity. The second assessment examined whether men are aware of change in themselves (recalled or anticipated) as a result of becoming a parent. Results revealed that self-perceptions focused on the fatherhood period were higher on measures of Nurturance, Generativity and Purpose in Life and lower on a measure of Impulsivity than assessments focused on the pre-fatherhood period. The experience of fathering facilitated male adult development on specific dimensions that define a maturing self-concept.

Psychological Development in Men During Fatherhood

Within the field of developmental psychology, much attention has been focused on examining the mother-child relationship. Until recently, there has been much less emphasis placed on understanding the father-child relationship. During the past few years there has been a wealth of studies directed toward understanding the salience of fathers in child development. The current available research has provided much evidence that infants are as attached to and influenced by their fathers as their mothers (Lamb, 1979, Parke, 1981). However relatively little attention has been paid to the effect of the infant on the father. That is, few have asked the reciprocal question -- how the child affects the fathers growth and development. While there has been research guided by psychoanalytic theory (Coley & James, 1976; Curtis, 1951; Freeman, 1951; Lacoursiere, 1972; Wainwright, 1966; Zilboorg, 1931), it has focused mainly on stressful psychopathological responses to fatherhood. Many social scientists would agree that childbirth has a psychological effect on the father. Fatherhood represents an important transitional period in a man's life - one that may necessitate numerous adjustments, but typically not to the debilitating degree suggested by the psychoanalytic literature. Severe psychopathology represents serious difficulties - not the norm (Deutscher, 1972). In the more normal case fatherhood might be

viewed as an experience producing growth and development - a kind of further step into the adult world. Little attention has been directed toward understanding the experience of fatherhood within the framework of normative adult development.

Erikson (1963) for example, a l-s d theorist, has hypothesized that fulfilling a parental role may contribute to the resolution of the ego challenge of middle adulthood, which he termed generativity vs. stagnation, thereby contributing to successful, healthy maturation. This stage of psychosocial development is expressed theoretically through a concern for guiding the next generation and showing an emphasis on productivity and creativity. Although Erikson's stage of generativity has not been extensively investigated, related studies suggest that the transition to fatherhood and, more generally the experience of fathering have broad implications for development in adulthood. Dyer (1963), for example, examined the effects of the first child upon family roles and relationships and reported that 50 percent of the fathers felt the responsibilities of parenthood represented a maturing experience. Gutmann (1975) summarizing the results of his interviews with parents in several cultures observed that men's characteristics were altered by fatherhood "toward greater responsibility, selflessness and moderation" (p. 170). Maxwell (1976) conducted semi-structured interviews of thirty middle-aged fathers. These men frequently found that in the process of child rearing they were forced to stop thinking about themselves and consider the needs of their children.

In an attempt to examine directly the specific meaning of fatherhood to men and its effects on maturation, Heath (1978) conducted a longitudinal investigation of eighty men from late adolescence to their mid-thirties. He compared the personality changes from adolescence to adulthood in men who were fathers with men who were not. Although during adolescence these men did not differ beyond chance expectations on measures of mental health competence and social background, in adulthood the fathers were more physically and psychologically healthy, more mature, more competent, better adapted vocationally and better satisfied with their marriages and sexual relations.

Along a similar vein other social scientists (Abrahams, Feldman & Nash, 1978; Feldman, Beringen, & Nash, 1981) view parenthood as a stage of life that involve the performance of distinct tasks which require a redefinition of behavior and attitudes as well as a reorientation of behavior. For example, these researchers have found that men's sex-role self-concepts and sex role attitudes were modified as a function of the demand characteristics of fatherhood.

It appears from the few studies available that becoming a father may increase growth on dimensions that define a maturing self-concept. The purpose of the present research was to examine the impact of fatherhood on male development. As a way of understanding developmental processes that are facilitated by fathering, comparisons were made between expectant fathers and fathers. The overall aim of the study was to advance understanding of the ways in which the experience of fatherhood influences the development and growth of men.

Method

Participants

Participants in the present study were 80 Caucasian married men expecting their first biological child (expectant fathers) and 80 Caucasian married men with one biological child (fathers). These children were between the ages of one and four. All participants were recruited from the New York metropolitan area and were either attending or had attended childbirth preparation classes. With one exception, all men were within the standard age range for experiencing fatherhood, approximately between 25 and 35 years of age (Nyddegar, 1981). Average length of education for expectant fathers and fathers was 15.23 years and 16.32 years respectively.

Measurement Variables

The measurement variables included three aspects of personality functioning: adaptive personality characteristics, psychological growth, and psychopathology. The personality domains consisted of sex role self-concept (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974), nurturance and impulsivity (Jackson, 1974), and a measure of traditional values termed value orthodoxy (Jackson, 1976). Dimensions of psychological growth included generativity and complexity (Ryff & Heincke, 1983), purpose in life (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969), and different facets of self-actualization theory (Shostrom, 1974). Finally, all participants completed a measure of different dimensions of psychopathological symptoms and distress which measured nine primary symptom dimensions and three global indices

of distress (Derogatis, 1977).

Design

The research design employed is illustrated in the Appendix section (see Table 1). Parental Status refers to the participants stage of life and included expectant fathers and fathers. Temporal Focus refers to two time periods -- Pre-fatherhood and Fatherhood, on which the participants focused in completing the various self-report instruments. As can be seen within Table 1, the cross classification of Parental Status and Temporal Focus produced a current assessment for both expectant fathers and fathers as well as a prospective assessment for expectant fathers and a retrospective assessment for fathers.

Procedure

The present research examined the impact of fatherhood on male psychological development in a twofold manner. First, to assess the extent to which the birth experience and actual parenthood produced differing self-perceptions comparisons were made between the current assessments of fathers and expectant fathers on various adaptive indices of personality and psychological growth. The second purpose of the study was to examine self-perceived changes resulting from the experience of fathering, that is, whether men are aware of change in themselves (recalled or anticipated) as a result of becoming a parent. This was accomplished with the use of an instructional variation procedure with self-assessments focused on either the period of time prior to fatherhood

or the first years of fatherhood. That is, expectant fathers were asked to respond to self-report instruments according to their current perceptions of expectant fatherhood or anticipated perceptions of early fatherhood (Prospection). Fathers provided current assessments or recalled perceptions prior to Fatherhood (retrospection). Specifically, the two hypotheses were: (1) with the exception of the index of impulsivity the current self-assessments of fathers would manifest higher levels on all personality and psychological growth indices than the current self-assessments of expectant fathers; and (2) self-perceptions focused on the fatherhood period would be higher on the various measures of personality and growth than self-perceptions focused on the pre-fatherhood period - again the reverse pattern of directionality was predicted for the Impulsivity scale. No specific hypotheses were formulated for the measures of maladaptive symptoms. The main focus of the study was on psychological growth in response to fatherhood - and these measures were included for comparative purposes.

Results

The first assessment examined the extent to which the birth experience and actual parenthood produced differing self-perceptions. As can be seen with Table 2 in the appendix) the results of t tests between the expectant fathers and fathers on the dependent measures revealed that as compared to expectant fathers, fathers had significantly higher scores on a measure of Purpose in Life, and two self-actualization scales: existentiality and synergy. Existentiality is defined as a personal

orientation in which the individual responds in a more "situational" fashion, that is, with a less rigid adherence to principles. Synergy refers to the capacity to transcend the dichotomies of life. In addition, trends toward an increase on a measure of Generativity and a decrease on a measure of Impulsivity were evident for the fathers. The only dimension of negative symptomology that was significantly different between these two groups was anxiety, with expectant fathers rating themselves higher than fathers.

The second purpose of the study was to examine anticipated personal changes of expectant fathers and recalled changes of fathers. The results of univariate analyses of variance on the adaptive indices of personality and psychological growth revealed that self-perceptions focused on the fatherhood period were higher on measures of Nurturance, Generativity and Purpose in Life, and lower on a measure of Impulsivity than assessments focused on the pre-fatherhood period (see Table 3 in appendix).

With regard to the measure of psychopathological symptoms and distress, although there were no main effects of Temporal Focus on any of these scales - significant main effects of Parental Status were obtained for all of the twelve subscales and the strength of the effect was quite strong across the majority of the scales. The directionality of the effect was also very consistent with the expectant fathers rating

themselves higher on all of the indices of psychopathological symptoms and distress than the fathers. Additionally, both groups perceived themselves as remaining stable on these measures over time. No specific hypothesis had been formulated regarding self-perceived change on the measures of problematic symptoms. The consistency of the parental status effect was therefore a strong but unexpected finding (see Table 4 in appendix section).

Discussion

Overall, the findings of the present study provide moderate support for the hypothesis that fatherhood facilitates male adult development. The impact of fatherhood on male psychological development appears to be confined to specific dimensions that define a maturing self-concept. Two of the five personality dimensions, impulsivity and nurturance, were related to prior theory and research on the impact of fatherhood. Specifically, the transition to fatherhood showed a trend toward perception of one's self as somewhat less hasty, rash and impatient, and thus more reflective and cautious. Previous findings (Gutmann, 1975; Heath, 1978) had indicated that the transition to fatherhood results in a shift in men toward a more allocentric, altruistic value system and an increase in moderation and selflessness. Further, men perceived themselves as increasingly nurturant which reflects the individual's sense of himself as sympathetic, comforting, and caring toward others. This finding may relate to the observation that father's

appear to be participating more actively in child-rearing and socialization, thereby influencing the psychological development of men by facilitating the emotional integration of expressive and nurturant aspects of personality.

The findings on the growth dimensions were more encouraging with outcomes supporting Erikson's model of development. That is, fatherhood facilitated a heightened concern for guiding the next generation coupled with a sense of responsibility to those younger in age. Furthermore, growth was also evident as an increased sense of purpose and meaning in life. This dimension refers to global aspects on life, such as a feeling of being in control, having clear-cut goals, aims and a satisfying life purpose, and viewing daily tasks with enthusiasm and pleasure. In short, it referred to having a sense of life as worthwhile. This growth dimension had not been examined in previous research, and therefore identifies a new dimension that shows a positive progressive change related to the experience of fatherhood. Finally, fatherhood facilitated the capacity to perceive situations in their full complexity and dimensionality.

With regard to the measures of psychopathological symptoms and distress, compared to the current assessments of fathers, the current assessments of expectant fathers manifested significantly higher levels of anxiety. This finding lends support to the psychoanalytic perspective that the onset of fatherhood is a stressful period, typically engendering anxiety. Such elevated levels of anxiety may have been heightened in

the present study by the expectant father's close proximity to the childbirth experience. Expectant fathers were recruited from ongoing childbirth education classes. Therefore, their wives were in their last trimester of pregnancy. The response to the impending birth may have intensified levels of anxiety among these men. This may also account for the robust findings on Parental Status for the measures of negative symptomology and distress. The heightened anxiety may have negatively influenced the expectant father's perceptions, both currently and prospectively, of their capacity to cope effectively with the new demands of their living situation. It may have been the anticipation of the birth, rather than the anticipation of being a father that produced an elevated sense of problems and concerns. Longitudinal studies that would directly follow men through the experience of fatherhood are needed to examine how expectant fathers deal with these troublesome anticipations.

It is also possible that the growth experiences that may ensue from fatherhood are not just the result of an experience that goes smoothly and easily, but rather follow from the confronting and "weathering" of the worries of parenthood. That is, expectant fathers may very typically be psychologically distressed about the increased responsibilities that lie ahead, but, in successfully meeting and coping with these

responsibilities they discover more of their inner resources and capacities. This idea is related to the perspective that the experience of stress or crisis may be a prerequisite to continued development, initiating restructuring processes that may result in further growth (Danish & D'Angelli, 1980; Reigel, 1975).

Future directions for research include the need to examine the impact of fatherhood on men of different races, socioeconomic levels and at other stages of the life cycle as well as examining psychological development in women during motherhood.

References

- Coley, S. B. & James, B. E. (1976). Delivery: A trauma for fathers?
The Family Coordinator, 25, 3-7.
- Crumbaugh, J. C., & Maholick, L. T. (1969). The purpose in life test.
Munster, Ind.: Psychometric Affiliates.
- Curtis, J. L. (1955). A psychiatric study of 55 expectant fathers.
U. S. Armed Forces Medical Journal, 6, 937-950.
- Danish, S. J. & D'Angelli, A. R. (1980). Promoting competence and
enhancing development through life development intervention. In
L. A. Bond and J. C. Rosen (Eds.). Competence and coping during
adulthood. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Derogatis, L. R. (1977). SCL-90-R Administration Scoring and Procedures
Manual I. Baltimore, Clinical Psychometric Research.
- Erikson, E.H. (1963). Childhood and Society (Second Ed.), New York:
W. W. Norton.
- Feldman, S. S., Biringen, Z. C., & Nash, S. C. (1981). Fluctuations of
sex-related self-attributions as a function of stage of family life
cycle. Developmental Psychology, 17, 24-35.
- Freeman, T. (1951). Pregnancy as a precipitant of mental illness in men.
British Journal of Medical Psychology, 24, 49-54.
- Gutmann, D. (1975). Parenthood: A key to the comparative study of the
life-cycle. In N. Datan and L. Ginsberg (Eds.), Life-span developmental
psychology: Normative life crises. New York: Academic Press.

- Heath, D. H. (1978). What meaning and effect does fatherhood have for the maturing of professional men? Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 24, 264-278.
- Jackson, D. N. (1974). Personality research form manual. Rev. Ed. Port Huron, MI: Research Psychologists Press.
- Jackson, D. N. (1976). Jackson personality inventory manual. Goshen, NY: Research Psychologists Press.
- LaCoursiere, R. B. (1972). Fatherhood and mental illness: A review and new material. Psychiatric Quarterly, 46, 109-124.
- Lamb, M. E. (1979). Paternal influences and the father's role. American Psychologist, 34, 938-943.
- Maxwell, J. W. (1976). The keeping fathers of America. The Family Cc-ordinator, 25, 613-616.
- Nydegger, C. (1981). The fatherhood study. Unpublished manuscript, University of Berkeley.
- Parke, R. D. (1981). Fathers. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Reigel, K. F. (1975). Adult life crises: A dialectical interpretation of development. In N. Datan and L. H. Ginsburg (Eds.), Life-span developmental psychology: Normative life crises. New York: Academic Press.
- Ryff, C. D., & Heincke, S. G. (1983). The subjective organization of personality in adulthood and aging. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 40, 33-43.

Shostrom, E. L. (1974). Manual for the Personal Orientation Inventory.

San Diego, CA: EDITS/Educational and Industrial Testing Service.

Spence, J., Helmreich, R., & Stapp, J. (1974). The Personal Attributes Questionnaire: A measure of sex-role stereotypes and masculinity-femininity. JSAS, Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology, 4, 43 (Ms. No. 617).

Wainwright, W. H. (1966). Fatherhood as a precipitant of mental illness.

American Journal of Psychiatry, 123, 40-44.

Zilboorg, G. (1931). Depressive reactions related to parenthood.

American Journal of Psychiatry, 10, 927-762.

Appendix

Psychological Development During Fatherhood

18

Table 1

<u>Parental Status</u>	<u>Temporal Focus</u>	
	Pre-Fatherhood	Fatherhood
Expectant Fathers	Current Assessment	Prospective Assessment
First-Time Fathers	Retrospective Assessment	Current Assessment

Note.

1. Independent Samples Design. N = 40 for each experimental condition. Total N = 160.
2. All participants were asked to respond to the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974), Generativity and Complexity scales (Ryff & Heinicke, 1983), Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969), Personal Orientation Inventory (Shostrom, 1963, 1974), the Nurturance and Impulsivity scales from the Personality Research Form (Jackson, 1974), the Value Orthodoxy scale from the Jackson Personality Inventory (Jackson, 1976) and the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis, 1977).

Table 2

COMPARISONS OF MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS BETWEEN EXPECTANT FATHERS AND FATHERS

Scale	Comparison		<u>t</u> value; <u>p</u>
	Expectant Fathers (n=40)	Fathers (n=40)	
Impulsivity	$\bar{x}$ = 44.13 SD = 10.35	$\bar{x}$ = 39.93 SD = 10.06	1.84 (p < .10)
Generativity	$\bar{x}$ = 70.35 SD = 7.82	$\bar{x}$ = 74.03 9.58	-1.88 (p < .10)
Purpose in Life	$\bar{x}$ = 106.05 SD = 14.05	$\bar{x}$ = 112.18 11.19	-2.16*
Existentiality	$\bar{x}$ = 19.00 SD = 4.21	$\bar{x}$ = 20.83 SD = 3.47	-2.11*
Synergy	$\bar{x}$ = 6.50 SD = 1.13	$\bar{x}$ = 7.08 SD = 1.14	-2.26*
Anxiety	$\bar{x}$ = .74 SD = .55	$\bar{x}$ = .51 SD = .44	2.05*

Note: Two tail tests employed

*p < .05

Psychological Development During Fatherhood
20

Table 3

OUTCOMES OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE ON MAIN EFFECT OF TEMPORAL FOCUS: COMPARISONS
BETWEEN SELF-PERCEPTIONS FOCUSED ON PRE-FATHERHOOD AND FATHERHOOD

Scale	df	SS	MS	F
Nurturance	1,156	384.400	384.400	4.36*
Impulsivity	1,156	688.900	688.900	7.30**
Generativity	1,156	1,134.23	1,134.23	14.92**
Purpose in Life	1,156	926.406	926.406	6.81**

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 4

OUTCOMES OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE ON MAIN EFFECT OF PARENTAL STATUS: COMPARISONS BETWEEN EXPECTANT FATHERS (COMBINED CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED SELF-ASSESSMENTS) AND FATHERS (COMBINED ASSESSMENT AND RECALLED SELF-ASSESSMENTS)

Scale	df	SS	MS	F
Feminine Sex-Role Self-Concept	1,156	160.000	160.000	9.94**
Synergy	1,156	7.22500	7.22500	5.09*
Somatization	1,156	4.21201	4.21201	7.48**
Obsessive-Compulsive	1,156	5.68516	5.68516	12.26***
Interpersonal Sensitivity	1,156	2.31602	2.31602	4.17*
Depression	1,156	2.21370	2.21370	4.38*
Anxiety	1,156	5.25988	5.25988	10.95***
Hostility	1,156	8.45940	8.45940	14.33***
Phobic Anxiety	1,156	2.83823	2.83823	7.38**
Paranoia	1,156	4.29025	4.29025	10.86***
Psychoticism	1,156	5.69648	5.69648	10.79***
Global Severity Index	1,156	4.56976	4.56976	13.93***
Positive Symptom Total	1,156	1552.01	1552.01	16.57***
Positive Symptom Distress Index	1,156	1.67486	1.67486	7.04**

*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$